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## STAGE DECORATION AND THE UNITY OF PLACE IN FRANCE IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

The simultaneous stage setting of the Middle Ages, with its freedom in regard to the number and situation of scenes, which was in vogue in Paris in the early years of the seventeenth century, was in direct opposition to the rule of the unity of place. The Middle Ages and classicism were at swords' points. Practice was arrayed against theory. When Corneille began to produce plays, he accepted the time-honored system of stage decoration; and, as he said, he followed Hardy and common-sense. There is little reason for believing that the appearance of the stage of the Hôtel de Bourgogne had changed at any time from the moment the Confrérie de la Passion took possession of it until at least 1637. Bapst is of the opinion that this theater had stage settings as long as the Confrérie had the management of it; but that from 1578, when other troupes rented it, no real scenery was set until Hardy's comedians began to play on its stage.<sup>1</sup> He argues that these comedians, who rented it from 1578 on, were nomadic; and he asks what they could do on their journeys with scenes at all large. Yet Scarron describes how the later wandering troupes carried scenery on their carts; and it must be remembered that it was almost invariably the practice of the professional drama to employ scenery, although the literary drama of the Renaissance may not have been produced with stage setting.<sup>2</sup> However, even in the representations of plays in colleges, scenery was improvised, if we may take as evidence the passage in Sorel's *Francion* in which he describes such a stage as follows: "Jamais vous ne vîtes rien de si mal ordonné que notre théâtre. Pour représenter une fontaine, on avait mis celle de la cuisine, sans la cacher de toile ni de branches, et l'on avait attaché les arbres au ciel parmi les nues."<sup>3</sup>

It is hard to believe that the custom of setting the stage suddenly died out for a quarter of a century at the Hôtel de Bourgogne only to

<sup>1</sup> Bapst, *Essai sur l'histoire du théâtre*, Paris, 1893, p. 148.

<sup>2</sup> Scarron, *Le roman comique*, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Sorel, *Histoire comique de Francion*, 1856, p. 140.

be revived by the troupe to which Hardy was attached. Even if the players of this period did not own scenery, what of that which belonged to the Hôtel de Bourgogne up to 1578? Surely it was not destroyed. It is natural to suppose that such settings were considered an asset, an important part of the theater, and were rented by those troupes which played at the Hôtel de Bourgogne from 1578 to 1599. The professional drama of the period would be practically unintelligible without the aid of scenery; and we are not to conjecture that the plays given from 1578 to the beginning of the seventeenth century in the Paris theater belonged to the scholastic drama of the followers of the Pléiade.

An important source of information concerning stage decoration in France in the second third of the seventeenth century is the *Mémoire* of Mahelot and Laurent.<sup>1</sup> This document, consisting of 94 folios, is entitled: *Mémoire de plusieurs décorations qui serve (sic) aux pièces contenues en ce présent livre, commencé par Laurent Mahelot et continué par Michel Laurent en l'année 1673*. Nothing certain is known of Mahelot and Laurent; but it is generally supposed that they were stage carpenters of the Hôtel de Bourgogne at different periods.<sup>2</sup> Mahelot could not have begun the *Mémoire* before 1633, since the second play whose setting it records is not anterior to that date. The handwriting changes for the first time on folio 81, and all the decorations described up to that point belong to plays produced before or during the year 1636, or possibly one produced in 1637, namely *Le berger fidelle*. Beauchamps cites six plays of this name, and Dacier suggests that the pastoral dated 1637 is the play whose setting is given.<sup>3</sup> The last description recorded in the first handwriting is that of *Iphis et Iante*, by Benserade, which was represented in 1636. The next description in the new handwriting is the setting of *Suréna*, produced in 1674. Thus the second part of the *Mémoire* could not have been begun before 1674; and the date 1673, given by the manuscript itself as the year in which Laurent continued the work of Mahelot, is slightly inaccurate. The first thing which Laurent did in taking up this task was to indicate the scenery for Corneille's plays produced after 1636, including the *Cid*. Therefore,

<sup>1</sup> Dacier, *La mise-en-scène à Paris au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Mémoire de Laurent Mahelot et Michel Laurent*. (Extrait des *Mémoires de la Société de l'Histoire de Paris et de l'Ile de France*, Vol. XXVIII.)

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135.

it seems that Mahelot had ceased to keep his record about the time that the *Cid* was given, for he does not describe the setting of any play produced after 1637. Had he kept up the *Mémoire*, we should have found the descriptions of Corneille's plays in his handwriting. It is evidently to supply this lacuna that Laurent begins in 1674 to bring the manuscript up to date. Thus about thirty-seven years pass between the work of Mahelot and that of Laurent.

The memoranda of the first part of the *Mémoire* are sufficient proof that the simultaneous stage setting was the rule until at least 1637. Even Corneille's *Illusion comique* (1636) requires a multiple setting consisting of a palace in the center of the stage; on one side, a cave in a mountain; and on the other side, a park. A slight modification of this system could be made by setting a scene only in some particular act, as in Mairet's *Criseïde et Arimante*, in which the "tomb and the altar appear only in the fifth act," according to Mahelot's memorandum. Also in *Les galanteries du duc d'Ossone* by Mairet there is found a procedure which may have been the beginning of the new method of changing the scene. In the second act the stage direction says: "Comme il est entré, la toile se tire qui représente la façade d'une maison, et le dedans du cabinet paroist." A second room is also disclosed in the same scene, as is shown by the direction: "Icy la seconde toile se tire, et Flavie paroist sur son lit." These two scenes, being placed side by side for dramatic purposes, form a simultaneous setting. In the next act the setting changes back to the original scene, for the direction reads: "Icy les deux toiles se ferment et Emilie paroist dans la rue." Such a procedure is not new on the French stage, for curtains were drawn on the mediaeval stage in order to hide such an event as the birth of a child; but in this play the curtain is used to disclose a new scene and this indicates the beginning of a new method of stage setting.

Another instance in which these two methods were combined is mentioned by d'Aubignac in regard to a performance of *Pirame et Thisbé*. In this case the wall which separated the two lovers was made to disappear in order that the actors might see each other, and in order to allow the space on each side of the wall to represent the two rooms of the hero and heroine.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> D'Aubignac, *La pratique du théâtre*, Amsterdam, 1715, Vol. I, p. 92.

Yet in spite of these possible modifications and exceptions, it does not seem to have been the regular practice to change scenery after the opening of a play; and one is inclined to question Danheisser's<sup>1</sup> theory that if the settings did not have to be changed at the beginning of each act, the author had observed a certain unity called the *unité de scène* in contradistinction to the later *unité de lieu*. It was quite possible to set at the same time two scenes representing places as far distant as the proverbial Rome and Constantinople, and the two scenes would not necessarily change during the whole play. This setting would not constitute any *unité de scène*; and if there is any distinction to be drawn between the two terms, it is rather that the *unité de scène* was observed in Mairet's *Silvanire*, where the different places represented are not far apart, although it is doubtful if any difference in meaning between the expressions can be pointed out.

Scudéry implies that the *Cid* was produced with a simultaneous setting, as were all the contemporary plays mentioned in the first part of the *Mémoire*. He says in his *Observations* that the same place represented the apartment of the king, that of the infanta, the house of Chimène, and the street, *presque sans changer de face*. The setting for the *Cid* is noted by Laurent in the second part of the *Mémoire* as *une chambre à quatre portes*; but this may well be a later setting, employed in order to conform more closely to the rule of the unity of place. Evidence in favor of this theory as to the changes in the setting, is found in the fact that the setting of Theophile's *Pirame et Thisbé* underwent a similar reduction in the number of scenes. It had been produced originally with the decoration noted by Mahelot as follows: "Il faut au milieu du théâtre un mur de marbre et de pierre fermé; des ballustres; il faut aussi de chasque costé deux ou trois marches pour monter. A un des costez du théâtre, un murier, un tombeau entouré de pyramides." When the play was revived in 1682, Laurent records the setting as consisting of the vague *palais à volonté*. However, vague and indefinite scenery, which finally became the rule, was strongly criticized at this period. Scudéry objects that the setting of the *Cid* is so inexact

<sup>1</sup> Danheisser, "Zur Geschichte der Einheiten in Frankreich," *Zeitschrift für französische Sprache und Litteratur*, XIV (1892), 48.

that the audience does not always know where the actors are supposed to be. He says in his preface to his *Didon* that it is necessary to please the people sometimes by the diversity of spectacles and by the different faces of the scenery. Rayssiguier expresses the same idea in the preface to his *Aminte*, in which he says that audiences wish to have their eyes pleased by *la diversité et changement de la face du théâtre*. Sarrazin complains in the preface to Scudéry's *Amour tyrannique* that the successors of Hardy have made an ambulatory stage, and that one does not know whether the actors are talking in their houses or in the streets. Corneille will later find the vague, single setting a means of concealing violations of the unity of place; but he wrote the *Cid*, as he did all his early plays, for a stage which was to be decorated with simultaneous settings.

After the production of the *Cid*, the dramatists were confronted on the one hand by the system of simultaneous stage decoration, which could be slightly modified by certain changes of scene, and, on the other hand, by the rule of the unity of place. The question was how to reconcile practice with theory. As has been shown, the public then, as always, enjoyed the element of spectacle in drama; and it was difficult to construct plots which would not demand a change of scene in order to be understood. Scudéry, in his *Mort de César*, avoided a palpable change of place by having the stage set with communicating rooms which remained hidden until the action was passing within them.<sup>1</sup> In the preface to *Proserpine*, a play in which the action takes place "au Ciel, en Sicile, et aux Enfers," Claveret makes the amusing statement that the reader can imagine a certain unity of place by conceiving it as a perpendicular line drawn from heaven to Hades. To such an extent was he ready to sacrifice reason for a rule supposed to be founded on reason.<sup>2</sup>

It is probable that *Cinna*, like the *Cid*, was produced at first with the usual simultaneous setting. The direction given by Laurent for this play, *le théâtre est un palais*, means that the drama came to be produced later with one scene; but Corneille implies that there were other scenes at first, when he advises in his *Discours* that the place should not change during an act but in the intermissions, "as happens

<sup>1</sup> Rigal, *Le théâtre français avant la période classique*, Paris, 1901, p. 290.

<sup>2</sup> Arnaud, *Étude sur la vie et les œuvres de l'abbé d'Aubignac*, Paris, 1888, p. 147.

in the first three of *Cinna*," and that these different places should not have different scenery. The fact that in 1660 Corneille was opposed to marking different scenes is strong evidence that scenery was quite in vogue up to that time.

La Mesnardière in his *Poétique*, published in 1640, is very liberal in his interpretation of the unity of place in its relation to scenery. In speaking of "asides" he says:

Je n'ignore pas les Raisons qu'allèguent les Poètes modernes pour excuser cette erreur. Je sçai qu'ils disent que la Scène étant vn lieu vaste et ample, par exemple, de l'étenduë de la ville de Paris, l'vn des endroits du Théastre peut représenter le Louure et l'autre la Place Royale; et partant qu'il faut supposer qu'encore que l'vn des Acteurs parle en la présence d'vn autre, celui qui est dans le Louure ne peut toutefois entendre ce que son Compagnon prononce dans vn cartier éloigné, comme dans la Place Royale. . . . Nous permettons aux Dramatiques d'étendre en ces occasions les bornes de leur Théastre et de partager leur Scène en plusieurs cartiers différens, pourveu qu'ils y fassent écrire, *Cet endroit figure le Louure, et Cy est la Place Royale*.<sup>1</sup>

There is no evidence that this suggestion in regard to the signs was carried out at this date, although they had been used in the Middle Ages, in at least one case, at Rouen in 1474. D'Aubignac says that the first time he read this passage he thought that La Mesnardière was joking in advocating such a procedure.<sup>2</sup> We naturally wonder whether La Mesnardière knew of the signs used on the English stage.

La Mesnardière, as late as 1640, is still advocating the old system which had come down from the Middle Ages, for, as he says, since the stage generally represents a whole city, often a small country, and sometimes a house, it must show as many scenes as it marks different places. It must not present a garden or a forest for the scene of an action which has happened in a palace; and even in this palace, the stage should not show anything happening in the apartment of the king which should take place in the queen's apartment. If the event has happened on the sea-shore, the stage must show a marine scene in one of its façades in order that the action may not be misunderstood. The whole stage should be arranged as follows:

<sup>1</sup> La Mesnardière, *La poétique*, Paris, 1640, p. 269.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 239.

Si l'Auanture s'est passée moitié dans le Palais d'un Roy en plusieurs appartemens, et moitié hors de la Maison en beaucoup d'endroits différens; il faut que le grand du Théastre, le *προσκήνιον* des Grecs, ie veux dire *cette largeur qui limite le parterre* serue pour tous les dehors où ces choses ont été faites, et que les Renfondremens soient divisez en plusieurs Chambres, par les diuers Frontispieces, Portaux, Colonnes, ou Arcades.<sup>1</sup>

Such a stage differs not at all from the setting of the mediaeval stage. It has been believed that scenery ceased to be a matter of importance after the production of the *Cid*; but stage setting is still so important that La Mesnardière even describes how certain single scenes should be constructed. The prison scene—one which dates back centuries in its use—should be mounted so that the prisoner could be contained within and not be allowed to leave its limits. The eyes of the spectator should be able to penetrate its depths, and the darkness and obscurity lit up by a sombre light would make the prison more frightful.<sup>2</sup> Mahelot directs that the prison in Du Ryer's *Clitophon* be set with a large, low, barred opening so that three prisoners may be seen. According to La Mesnardière the same arrangement applies to cave scenes. Their mouths must open on the stage like a door; and if the cave is supposed to be closed, the interior must be made visible by means of a barred opening. Thus the dark cavern will seem more cruel in proportion as it is more closed, darker, and more horrible.

La Mesnardière objects to the custom of re-using scenery which grew up on account of the indigence of the comedians. Each play, he claims, should have its own scenery, and Rome should not be turned into Constantinople and Libya into Norway. He, too, was against the inexactness of stage decoration, and he says it is a mistake to represent what happened in the room of a king as taking place in a scene which is vague and open on all sides like a public square.<sup>3</sup> He bids the dramatist study the scenery and the arrangement of the setting. If the action is what he calls "pacific," his scenery will be composed of palaces and gardens; but if the action represents a tumult, war, and the chase, the dramatist will choose for the place of the action the vastness of fields and forests. Care must be taken to see that a cave scene is not used for a hunting scene; and one must be sure that the beautiful spectacles furnished by perspectives,

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 412.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 411 f.



caves, woods, palaces, and other scenes are not contrary to reason or verisimilitude. Thus does he apply the classical test of reason to the construction and arrangement of scenery; but in regard to the interpretation of the rule of the unity of place he is very free. He says that according to the *unité de la scène* the action should not be carried to different climates, but it should be bounded by the extent of a small country.<sup>1</sup> La Mesnardière is interpreting the rule of the unity of place, not in accordance with reason or verisimilitude, but in terms of the contemporary stage decoration. His expression *unité de la scène* is evidence that he was thinking of stage conventions and conditions, and not of the theories of the critics. To observe the unity of time was much easier. Time could be indefinite, and the audience could be deceived; but with the different scenes before the eyes of the spectator, he easily recognized a violation of the unity of place. The system of stage setting was in direct opposition to the rule; and that is one reason why d'Aubignac could say that he knew of only one play which observed the unity of place: Corneille's *Horace*.

By the time that d'Aubignac is writing his *Pratique du théâtre*, the multiple stage decoration has not been discarded, for he criticizes the young poets who are inspired to write a play and place France at one end of the stage, Turkey at the other, and Spain in the middle, while if anyone is supposed to pass over the sea from Denmark to France, the action is indicated by the drawing of a scene. He also points out the mistake of the poets who place on the stage at the same time some characters supposed to be in Spain and others supposed to be in France.<sup>2</sup> The fact that he makes fun of this procedure is evidence that the old system is still used. Otherwise he would not have attacked it. He is evidently thinking of a stage on which several scenes are set at once, and, also, of a change of scene.

D'Aubignac is far more restricted than La Mesnardière in his interpretation of the unity of place. He asserts that the ground on which the actors walk must not change; and that the place represented by the stage cannot be greater than the space in which a man can see another, although recognition may not be possible.

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 416 ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Pratique du théâtre*, I, 24 and 95.

However, this does not preclude a change of scenery, which can be managed as follows:

. . . . des-lors qu'on a choisi un Terrain pour commencer quelque action par représentation, il le faut supposer immobile dans tout le reste du Poème, comme il l'est en effet. Il n'en est pas de même du fond, et des côtes du Théâtre; car comme ils ne figurent que les choses qui environnoient dans la vérité les Personnages agissans, et qui pouvoient recevoir quelque changement, ils peuvent aussi changer en la représentation; et c'est en cela que consistent les changemens de Scènes, et ces Décorations dont la variété ravit toujours le peuple, et même les habiles quand elles sont bien faites. Ainsi nous avons vu sur un Théâtre une façade de temple ornée d'une belle architecture, et puis venant à s'ouvrir, on découvroit en ordre de perspective des colonnes, un autel, et tout le reste des autres ornemens merveilleusement représentez; tellement que le lieu ne changeoit point, et cependant souffroit une belle Décoration.<sup>1</sup>

The Mahelot *Mémoire* records a similar change of scene in Benserade's *Iphis et Iante*, giving the direction: "The temple is closed until the fifth act and opens in the middle of the act." Racine employs the same device in *Athalie*, and Voltaire revives it in his *Mahomet* as late as 1742.

D'Aubignac does not stop with this compromise between a rigorous observance of the unity of place and scenic change, which is so important an element of drama even in his generation. He wishes to preserve at all costs the unity of place, which, he says, "now passes as valid"; but the old system of stage setting so appeals to him that he tries to reconcile it to the rule of the unity of place in the following manner:

. . . . on pourroit feindre un Palais sur le bord de la Mer abandonné à de pauvres gens de la campagne; Un Prince arrivant aux côtes par naufrage, qui le feroit orner de riches tapisseries, lustres, bras dorez, tableaux et autres meubles précieux: Après on y feroit mettre le feu par quelque aventure, et le faisant tomber dans l'embrasement, la Mer paroîtroit derrière, sur laquelle on pourroit encore représenter un combat de Vaisseaux. Si bien que dans cinq changemens de Théâtre, l'Unité du lieu seroit ingénieusement gardée.

Ce n'est pas que le Sol ou l'Aire de l'Avant-Scène ne puisse changer aussi bien que le fond et les côtes, ou que ce soit seulement en la superficie; car cela se feroit sans perdre l'unité du lieu: Par exemple, ainsi que les Géants porteront dans la Fable Pelion sur Osse: Ou si par un débordement de

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, I, 90.

quelque fleuve, l'Avant-Scène venoit à être couverte d'eau, ainsi que le Tybre à Rome sous Auguste: Ou enfin si par Magie on faisoit sortir de terre des flammes et des brazier ardents, qui tout d'un coup vinssent à couvrir le Sol de l'Avant-Scène. En toutes ces rencontres donc le lieu recevoit du changement, et même fort notable, sans en violer pourtant l'unité.<sup>1</sup>

It must be confessed that these scenes smack pretty strongly of romantic melodrama to have been devised by a classicist, and they show how strong was the tradition of the multiple stage decoration. On the other hand, d'Aubignac objected to the stage representing a whole town or even showing the different apartments of a palace; and he adds that his objection cannot be answered by saying that to mark the different apartments there may be curtains to shut and draw, for these curtains are fit for nothing but to toss their inventors in.<sup>2</sup> He would have had a hard time in so punishing the inventors of this device, for the use of these curtains dates back to the Middle Ages.

The procedure of changing scenes had evidently come more and more into vogue, for d'Aubignac advises that all permanent scenes to be represented be already placed on the stage when the play begins, in order that the surprise and applause which generally attend such sights may be over before the actors begin to speak. If it is necessary to change the decorations, the shift should be made in the interval between the acts so that the stage hands may have time to get their machine moving.<sup>3</sup> Thus the scenery seems to have been concealed from view before the play began, otherwise d'Aubignac would not have suggested that the scenery be set at the *ouverture du théâtre*, so that the murmurs of the audience might subside before the actors began. As for the dropping of the curtain between the acts, Bapst says that this did not happen until the nineteenth century;<sup>4</sup> but that statement must be modified somewhat. Perhaps as a rule the entr'actes were marked by violin playing and the scene remained in full view of the spectators. D'Aubignac warns poets not to suppose that events have taken place between the acts in the scene shown on the stage, "which is open and exposed to the eyes of the spectators" during the intermissions, for in that case the audience ought to have seen those things which are supposed to have happened.<sup>5</sup> If a change

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, I, 91.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 94.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 326.

<sup>4</sup> Bapst, *op. cit.*, p. 385.

<sup>5</sup> D'Aubignac, I, 218.

had to be made in the scenery at any time during the performance, the curtain was dropped. This curtain is described by d'Aubignac as the "toile de devant, qui ne fait point partie de la décoration, et qu'on tire seulement quand on y veut changer quelque chose; afin que le peuple ne s'aperçoive point du désordre qui se fait en ces ajustemens, et qu'il soit plus agréablement surpris en voyant soudainement une nouvelle face du théâtre."<sup>1</sup> Music accompanied this drawing of a curtain to mark a change of scene, for d'Aubignac says sarcastically that to pass from France to Denmark "il ne faut que trois coups d'archet ou tirer le rideau."<sup>2</sup>

An example of a play in which changes of scenery were made during the intermissions is found in Molière's *Don Juan*. Laurent records the setting as follows: first act, a palace; second act, a room and a sea; third act, a wood and a tomb; fourth act, a room; fifth act, the tomb. The setting for the second act—a room and a sea—is practically a simultaneous setting. The decoration for *Andromaque*, given as "a palace with columns and a sea with ships," also the setting for *Iphigénie*, given as "tents and a sea with ships," correspond in a modified way to the simultaneous scenes of the old system. In such scenes as the last, the unity of place is not destroyed by the scenery; and this system is far better suited to preserve the unity of place than the procedure of changing scenes between the acts or at any other time during the performance. This point was brought out very plainly by Cailhava at the end of the eighteenth century. He called attention to the fact that the first act of *Démocrète amoureux* takes place in a wood and the other acts are at the court. Thus, while these two places are not far distant, yet the changes in decoration destroy the illusion. The author of *Isabelle et Gertrude*, however, in making the action take place during the night, part of the time in a dark garden and part of the time in a lighted room, had the theater represent a garden embellished with a boudoir, but placed so that the

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 182.

<sup>2</sup> Another bit of evidence that the curtain was sometimes lowered between the acts in the next century is furnished by a passage in the *Journal littéraire* (VI, 44) quoted by Arnaud (*op. cit.*, p. 384) as a piece of almost contemporary criticism. Unfortunately, Arnaud does not give the exact date of the passage; but the *Journal littéraire* belongs to the eighteenth century. In criticizing d'Aubignac's rigorous interpretation of the unity of place the *Journal* says: "Pourquoi ne pourrait-on s'imaginer que, pendant que le rideau est baissé, dans l'intervalle d'un acte, on est transporté, avec les acteurs, de la galerie du Louvre aux Tuileries. . . ."

spectator saw everything which happened on the whole breadth of the stage. Thus, he claims, the illusion was increased instead of being destroyed, as it is when walls and cities disappear at the sound of the stage manager's whistle.<sup>1</sup>

Since the changing of scenery was out of keeping with the unity of place, either the somewhat modified multiple stage setting or the single indefinite scene had to come into use when the rule became binding. It was Corneille who found a way out of the difficulty in the vague and inexact settings which had been so criticized until 1660, the date of his *Discours*. He advocated an indefinite scene—a *lieu théâtral*—which would not be the apartment of any one character, but into which all apartments would open and in which the characters would speak, as if they were in their own rooms. Thus the actors on the stage, instead of going to the apartments of the other characters, could remain on the stage and be sought by the latter. In this way the continuity of scenes would be preserved and the unity of place would be observed.<sup>2</sup> The stage setting of the *Cid* described by Laurent as *une chambre à quatre portes* corresponds exactly to this scheme of a *lieu théâtral*, and perhaps was introduced at Corneille's request. Corneille also advocated naming only the general place in which the action was supposed to happen, as Paris or Rome; and even if two places were necessary to the action, he recommended that they be not marked by different scenery and that they remain unnamed. This expedient, he says, will help to deceive the spectator, who, not seeing the different places marked, will not perceive the change of scene except by critical and malicious reflexion, while in the *Menteur* the different decorations made the change of place only too visible.<sup>3</sup> He admits in the *Examen* of the *Place royale* that he has violated the unity of place by introducing the scene in Angélique's room; but this is necessary because the heroine would not lament in the street. He had used the old system in his early plays, although he had given up the liberty of placing Rome and Constantinople on the stage at the same time. Yet he merely reduced his unity of place to a whole city in these early plays, and

<sup>1</sup> Cailhava, *De l'art de la comédie*, Paris, Vol. I, 242.

<sup>2</sup> Corneille, *Œuvres* (collection des grands écrivains), Paris, 1862, I, 119 f.

<sup>3</sup> *Loc. cit.*

allowed the scene to change. He was guided in this, not by reason, but by theatrical conventions of his time. In the *Examen* of *Andromède*, moreover, Corneille defends his violation of the rule on the ground that such plays, depending for success on their scenery, require the action to be placed in different localities. In fact he declares that a city hardly suffices. Thus the rule of the unity of place seems to have been quite elastic, at least as far as general practice is concerned, up to 1660. The critics could theorize as much as they pleased, but the only limit imposed upon the rule by the playwrights was the limits of a city. It is after this date that the vague *palais à volonté* becomes the more usual scene, but even then it is by no means the only one. Had it been the regular setting before that time, Corneille would hardly have taken the trouble to advocate its use in order to preserve the illusion of the unity of place.

The fact that the later plays of Corneille and the plays of Racine were produced with one scene, coupled with the great reputation of these men, is likely to bring one to the conclusion that in the latter half of the seventeenth century the stage was always set with one vague and unchangeable scene; but such was not the case, as is proved by the second part of the *Mémoire*. On the contrary, there were several methods which grew out of the different ways of combining the old simultaneous setting with the present system of changing scenes. The single scene could be modified in two ways, as has been shown: (1) by following d'Aubignac's suggestion of opening up a temple, a procedure which was carried out by Racine in *Athalie*; or (2) by making the one scene large enough to show two places not far distant, as in the setting of *Andromaque*, which shows a palace with columns and, in the background, a sea with ships. The *Menteur* and *Don Juan*, the latter being recorded after August 25, 1680, are examples of plays in which changes of scene were made between the acts. In 1678, Corneille's *Le comte d'Essex* is presented with a change of scene in the fourth act in which the prison appears. *Jodelet prince*, by Scarron, and a *Mariamne*, of uncertain authorship, recorded by Laurent after 1678, also change the scenery between the acts. *La femme juge et party*, in which the "théâtre est deux maisons sur le devant et le reste une chambre," is an example of the old simultaneous setting still in use at this time, the setting being thus

described by Laurent in 1678. *La dame invisible*, by Th. Corneille and Hauteroche, produced in 1684, requires a street scene for the first act and two separate rooms for the second act, thus showing a combination of the two systems of stage setting. Out of ninety-three plays whose setting is described in the second part of the *Mémoire*, thirty-six employ one of these means to bring about a change of scene. This number does not include the plays which require a public square and houses, although they, too, are merely modifications of the old mediaeval method.

When one calls to mind the famous *pièces à machines*, such as *Andromède* and *La toison d'or*, the ballets, and the representations at court of even classical tragedies, such as *Iphigénie*,<sup>1</sup> it is easily seen that the theater-goer of the latter half of the seventeenth century was not at all unaccustomed to fairly good stage setting and to changes of scenery brought about in one way or another, in spite of the acceptance of the rule of the unity of place. The rule was evidently stronger in theory than in practice. It modified scenery by reducing the number of scenes which might be represented and by reducing the extent of the scene, first to a town and then to a certain part of a town; but, although the single setting appeared for the majority of plays, this majority is not overwhelming, if the *Mémoire* may be taken as evidence. The existence of scenery militated against the acceptance of the rule of the unity of place and robbed it of much of its force even after the contemporary critics asserted that it was accepted.

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<sup>1</sup> See the description of this setting as given in the *Mercure galant* (1675); Lemaitre, *Racine*, Paris, 1908, p. 226.